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Welcome,

This is the first issue of the newsletter of *z-proso*, the Zurich study on the social development of children. Its purpose is to disseminate information about the project to researchers working in related fields. The newsletter will appear at irregular intervals and be distributed electronically. Please send an email to gfrey@paed.unizh.ch if you wish to be included on our recipient list. Alternatively you will also find the newsletter on our webpage, which is currently under construction.

Project Description

**The Zurich Intervention and
Prevention Project at Schools
- zipps -**

by

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Institute of Criminology, University of Cambridge

The “Zurich Intervention and Prevention Project at Schools – *zipps*” is a major research and intervention project designed to improve social skills of primary school children and to reduce various types of externalizing problem behaviour. It combines a longitudinal study with the randomized implementation of two prevention programmes aimed at promoting life skills among primary school children.

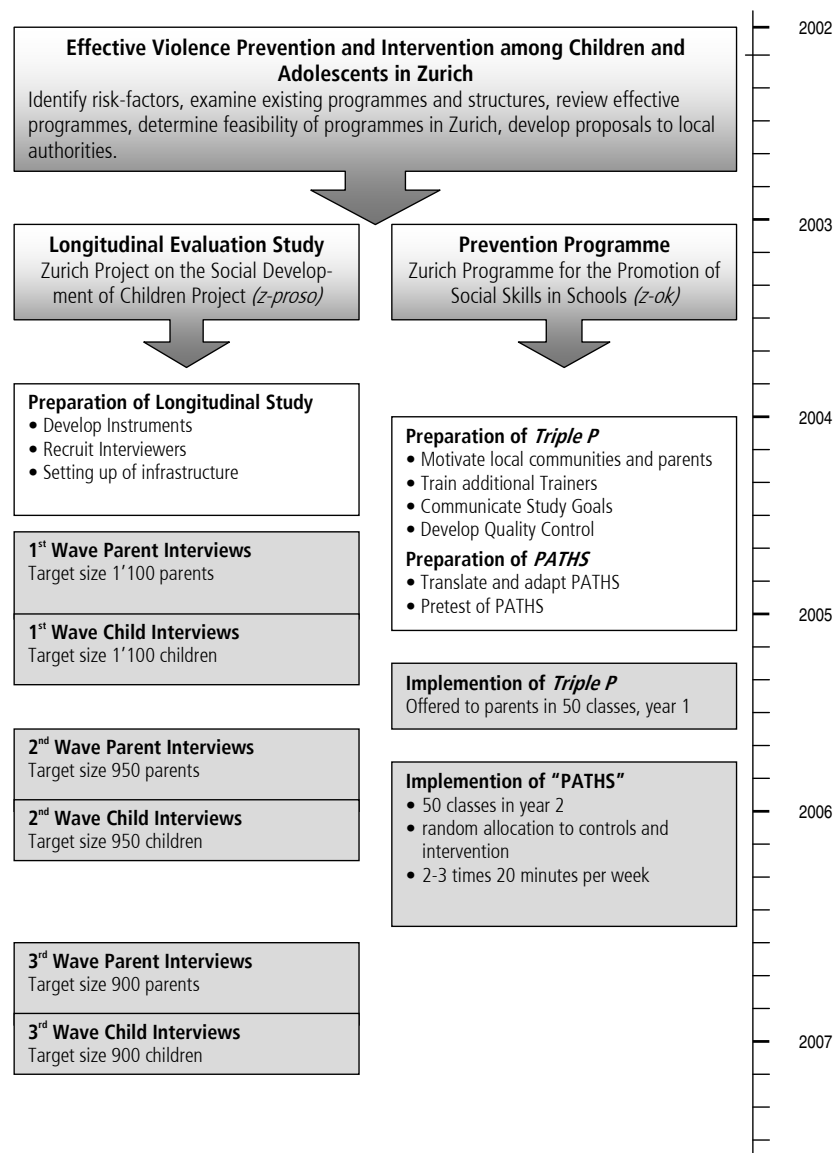
It is guided by developmental theory positing that influences at different levels interact throughout the life-course in promoting or inhibiting pro-social competencies of children and adolescents. Among these, risk factors associated with the family (e.g., erratic parenting, harsh discipline, low parental bonds, partner conflict) and the child’s personality (e.g., impulsivity, risk-seeking, attention deficits) are among the empirically best established antecedents of later problem behaviour. The current study hence experimentally introduces a programme aimed at promoting parenting skills and a school-based curriculum to improve pro-social competencies among children. Their effectiveness will be evaluated by means of a

longitudinal study of a targeted sample of 1,000 children and including three annual waves of interviews.

Figure 1 gives an overview of the entire project consisting of three intertwined studies. The “Effective Violence Prevention and Intervention among Children and Adolescents in Zurich” study aimed at providing a risk and resource assessment to support the local authorities, in cooperation with the research team, to select appropriate prevention programmes. It led to two subsequent studies: The “Zurich Project on the Social Development of Children – *z-proso*” is essentially a longitudinal study that includes three waves of interviews with children and a parent at 12-month intervals as well as annual teacher assessments. In turn, the “Zurich Programme for the Promotion of Social Skills in Schools – *z-ok*” will implement two universal prevention programmes in approx. 50 randomly selected school classes during years one and two of primary school.

The two projects are institutionally and financially separated. The longitudinal study is directed by Dr. Manuel Eisner (Institute of Criminology, University of Cambridge) and funded by the National Research Programme 52 of the Swiss National Science Foundation, the Substance Abuse Research Unit of the Swiss Federal Office of Public Health, the Planning Unit of the Canton of Zurich Directorate of Education, and the Department of Integration and Civil Liberty of the Swiss Federal Office of Immigration, Integration, and Emigration. The project is hosted by the Institute of Education Science of the University of Zurich. The implementation of the model programmes is coordinated and financed by the School and Sport Department of the City of Zurich Council. The two project teams hold regular meetings to ensure close coordination.

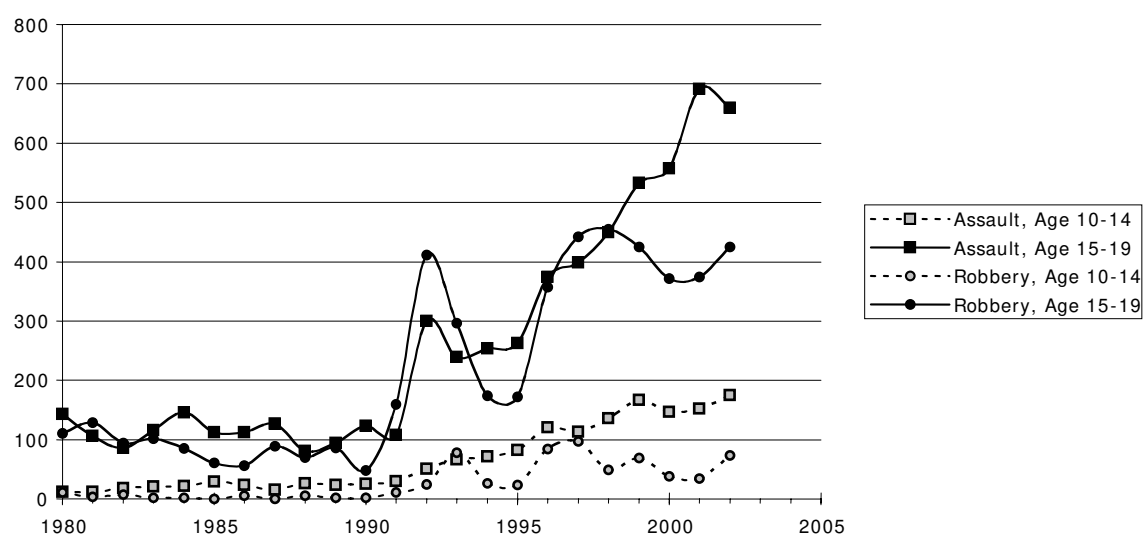
Figure 1 Project Overview



The City of Zurich and its Crime Situation

The city of Zurich has a population of about 363,000; about 1 mio. inhabitants live in the metropolitan area. Zurich is Switzerland's most important economic centre with financial services playing a prominent role. The mean per capita income in Zurich is significantly higher than the national average, which itself is among the highest in the world. The city has traditionally attracted large numbers of immigrants. Currently, about 30 percent of the city population are foreign nationals.

Overall, crime levels in Switzerland are below the average of Western European countries. They have remained basically stable during the past 20 years (Eisner and Killias, 2004). In a similar vein, overall crime in the Zurich metropolitan area has fluctuated around a basically stable level since the beginning of police statistics in 1980. However, police data suggest a strong increase in youth violence since about 1990 (see figure 2).

Figure 2 Assault and Robbery per 100,000, Canton of Zurich, Ages 10-14 and 15-19

Source: Canton of Zurich Police Statistics, 1980-2002

Analysis of recent self-report and victimisation data suggests higher levels of violence in socially disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Furthermore, we examined individual, family, school, and neighbourhood risk factors associated with youth violence (Eisner et al., 2000). Not surprisingly, most risk factors known from other studies could also be identified as such in the Zurich survey. For example, class-room levels of violent problem behaviour are correlated with a low socio-economic status of the neighbourhood, a poor school climate, poor motivation of parents to participate in school-related activities, and high levels of other types of problem behaviour.

However, male immigrant minority youth emerge as a high-risk group. According to police statistics, immigrants commit almost 80 percent of youth violent offences in the Canton of Zurich. Self-report data also support the notion of a considerable overrepresentation of immigrants in violent behaviour. This finding is highly relevant for developing an effective prevention and intervention programme since it highlights the importance of considering language and cross-cultural communication issues in developing such a programme.

Selecting appropriate prevention programmes

From the onset, a major goal of the current project was to provide the local authorities with research-based evidence on the effectiveness of prevention programmes with a view to later permanent implementation. For this reason it seemed important to thoroughly assess the current needs and resources in the City of Zurich and to carefully select appro-

priate programmes in collaboration with local experts. The "Effective Violence Prevention and Intervention among Children and Adolescents in Zurich" project – carried out in 2002 – served this purpose. It aimed at providing background information and building a knowledge base for developing the planned intervention and prevention programmes. Amongst others, we examined existing structures of prevention and intervention by means of 20 semi-structured expert interviews. Results here showed that the City of Zurich possesses a dense network of institutions and activities targeting different age groups. We identified over 60 programmes and institutions that can be considered as part of violence prevention and intervention activities. However, none of the existing programmes had been evaluated. Also, many programmes emphasized punctual one-off interventions after an incident rather than continuous efforts embedded in, for example, the regular school curriculum. Finally, many of our interview partners saw a need for general prevention programmes that target children before adolescence and that integrate individual, family, and community level activities.

We then combined this risk and resource assessment with a review of current criminological knowledge about effective prevention and intervention programmes. In addition to summarizing existing reviews of US-American research (e.g., Blueprints of the Center of Study and Prevention of Violence of the University of Colorado), we also tried to include findings from European evaluations. On this basis, the final report recommended nine model programmes to be considered for implementation in the City of Zurich. The recom-

mended programmes share four qualities: (a) they had been shown to be effective in high-quality evaluation research elsewhere; (b) they target risk factors that can be shown to be relevant in the context of the city of Zurich; (c) they fill gaps not yet covered by ongoing prevention and intervention programmes; (d) they can be evaluated by means of a randomized experiment within a longitudinal study.

These recommendations were presented to the City of Zurich authorities in early 2003. A series of meetings with a working group served to further refine and delineate our proposals. As a result, the City of Zurich authorities have agreed to implement the two prevention programmes *Triple P* and *PATHS*, targeting parents and children respectively.

Triple P

The *Triple P* – Positive Parenting Program is a multilevel parenting and family support strategy that aims at preventing severe behavioural, emotional and developmental problems in children from birth to age 12 by enhancing the parents' knowledge, skills and confidence. The programme was developed by Professor Matt Sanders and colleagues from the Parenting and Family Support Centre of the School of Psychology at the University of Queensland, Australia.

It has been translated into German and is run in Switzerland by the Centre for Family Counseling and Research at the University of Fribourg. *Triple P* consists of five different levels ranging from universal parent information strategies at level 1 to a specialised intensive intervention programme for families with different sources of distress. The Zurich Model Prevention Project will implement level 3. It includes four two-hour sessions in small groups of parents. As part of the course parents will receive a videotape and teaching material. Subsequent telephone contacts support parents in further developing their educational goals. *Triple P* is a form of behavioural family intervention based on social learning principles. It aims at enhancing family protective factors and at reducing risk factors associated with behavioural and emotional problems of children. *Triple P* has been variously evaluated and been shown to be effective in improving family management techniques, parental confidence in effective child rearing, and improving behavioural outcomes including health behaviour and aggression.

A major problem of parenting programmes such as *Triple P* consists in whether families at risk can be motivated to participate. The Zurich project includes several strategies to maximize participation among the parents in the experimental group. First, the costs of the *Triple P* course will be borne by the City of Zurich and a free child-care service will be provided. Second, parent-teacher meetings will be used to promote *Triple P* to parents that may

not be successfully approached by other means of communication. Finally, the programme will be implemented during the first year of primary school when parent interest in promoting and supporting their children can be expected to be particularly high.

PATHS

Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies

The *PATHS* (Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies) curriculum is a comprehensive programme for promoting emotional and social skills and reducing aggression and behaviour problems in primary school-aged children while simultaneously enhancing the educational process in the classroom. It has been developed by Prof. Mark Greenberg (Prevention Research Center of Pennsylvania State University) and Dr. Carol Kusche and is one of the most thoroughly and repeatedly evaluated school based social skills programmes at hand. *PATHS* is aimed at reducing disruptive behaviour and improving the child's prosocial development by means of learning skills and knowledge relevant to the development of self-control, empathy, the understanding, expression and regulation of emotions, and effective social problem solving. In addition, the programme also targets improvements in classroom and school ecology.

PATHS will be taught 2-3 times per week for about 20-30 minutes per day. It provides teachers with systematic, developmentally appropriate lessons, materials, and instructions for teaching their students emotional literacy, self-control, social competence, positive peer relations, and interpersonal problem-solving skills. Teachers will receive training in a two- to three-day workshop and in regular meetings with the curriculum consultant.

In Europe, *PATHS* has been introduced and translated in the Netherlands. However, at present no German translation is available. The City of Zurich is hence funding the translation of year two of the *PATHS* curriculum into German. This includes the adaptation of the material to a different cultural context, extensive discussions with local education experts, and the piloting of selected lessons in primary school classrooms.

Design of the Longitudinal Study

The implementation of the two programmes is closely coordinated with the longitudinal study. The baseline population for this study is comprised of all children in the approximately 150 1st grade classes of primary school in the City of Zurich. A random sample with a target size of 100 classes will be drawn. Classes in disadvantaged neighbourhoods will be oversampled. This is to increase the yield in problem behaviours and, hence, the likelihood of detecting significant effects of the prevention programmes.

With 100 classes, the initial size of our sample is expected to be around 1,800 children aged 7. Parents will be contacted before and immediately after summer holidays of 2004 for consent to participate in the study. Written informed parental consent will be needed for the children's participation in the longitudinal study and will be obtained at the initial parent interview. We expect that up to 40 percent of parents may refuse participation resulting in an initial net sample of about 1,100 children.

Interviews with the primary caregiver – usually the mother – are planned to take place at the parents' home. The interviews with the children will be realised in the schools by interviewing the children one-by-one during regular class-hours. In order to simplify the process of data collection we will perform computer-assisted personal (i.e., face-to-face) interviews (CAPI) with both the parents and the children. This method allows improving overall reliability since filtering structures in the questionnaire are automated and invalid value entry indicated to the interviewer but also since it permits to skip potentially error bearing procedures like data entry from written questionnaires. Simultaneously, this method also leads to a substantial reduction of costs (copying of questionnaires and data entry), which compensates by far the investment in the required hard- and software. In addition, teachers will be asked to complete short assessments of the participating children.

The Zurich Project on the social development of children is situated in a highly multi-cultural context. On average, 42 percent of the children in primary schools are non-Swiss nationals, with their proportion ranging between 4 and 80 percent depending on the neighbourhood. According to education statistics, 46 percent of first graders have learned a language different from German as their first language. In 2002, the most frequent non-German language was Albanian followed by Serbo-Croatian languages, Portuguese Italian, Turkish, and Spanish. Since immigrant origin is often associated with living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods and exposure to other risk factors relevant for our study, special effort will be made to motivate members of immigrant communities to participate.

Most notably, we will translate the questionnaires into the main Non-German languages mentioned above. We currently assume that translating the parent questionnaire will be more important than translating the child questionnaire. As a consequence, interviewers will need to be recruited that are fluent in the respective languages. They will be extensively trained before field work.

After the baseline measurement (Aug. 2004 – Feb. 2005), a random sample of 50 classes will be drawn to be included in the family management programme *Triple P*. After the second wave of interviews, another round of sampling will be done

to allocate classes to the school-based programme. By combining randomised allocation of the family-based and the school-based programmes the study will be able to empirically evaluate whether combining both family and school level programmes yields additional value to each programme separately. Preliminary statistical power analysis (assuming an alpha of 0.05 and a 75% chance to detect a difference) suggests that our sample size will suffice to identify a 10% difference in problem behaviour between the children participating in the intervention and the controls.

Significance of the Study

It is now widely accepted within criminology that the explanation of adolescent problem behaviour including delinquency requires empirically supported life-course models that account for the dynamic relationships between explanatory levels such as the individual, the family, school, and the neighbourhood context. It is also clear that progress in the prevention of problem behaviour requires randomized experimental studies that will gradually lead to cumulative knowledge of what works and what does not. Both insights are tied together by the axiom that correct identification of a presumed cause provides the means to change the outcome by its intentional manipulation.

However, empirical studies that combine randomized interventions at different levels with a longitudinal design have remained rare, despite considerable progress over the past two decades. Moreover, European research considerably lags behind the progress made over the past two decades in the United States. The current project is an attempt at partially filling this gap.

International Expert Group

The project is supported by an international panel of experts including *Annette Cina* (University of Fribourg, CH), *Alfons Crijnen* (University of Rotterdam, NL), *David Farrington* (University of Cambridge, UK), *Mark Greenberg* (Pennsylvania State University, USA), *Pol van Lier* (University of Rotterdam, NL), *Friedrich Lösel* (University of Nürnberg-Erlangen, GER), *Daniel Nagin* (Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh, USA), *Matthew Sanders* (University of Queensland, AUS), *Richard Tremblay* (University of Montreal, CAN), *Per-Olof Wikström* (University of Cambridge, UK).

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